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Let Love Lead!

Truth About God: God is love, and love is the foundation of everything He does.
Truth For My Life: I will minister to others in love.
Lesson Text: 1 Corinthians 13-14
Key Passage: 1 Corinthians 13:1 -Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul compared a life of ministry that lacks love to a banging going or a crashing symbol. Love is the distinguishing factor between lives that aid and lives that annoy. Without it, our message is lost in the noise. The issue of love is worth our attention, as its presence or absence resounds into effective ministry.

Paul interrupted inspired instruction on the proper use of spiritual gifts to show the church a "*more excellent way*" (1 Corinthians 12:31). While the church should seek spiritual gifts, pursuing love is an even greater priority. **Gifted people who lack love also lack substance; their contribution is essentially worth nothing** (v. 3). We may desire to be spiritually gifted or publicly generous for many reasons. We might seek public recognition for our spirituality or serve others to make ourselves look or feel better. Motivation matters. When we act without love, our influence and our very souls are hollowed. When we act in love, the smallest acts of grace are hallowed.

Love is the fertile ground where many other virtues blossom (1 Corinthians 13). Love is personified as if it were an active force. God so consistently behaves in love because He is love (1 John 4:16). That is why we must be so trained by love that this Christlike virtue is completely embodied in us. Paul put love in eternal perspective. The virtue that endures all manner of opposition in this life, maintaining belief and hope, will endure in the resurrection. Love never fails or falters. This virtue will abide in God's new creation as the principal way we relate to Him and His kingdom. Because love will abide while gifts fade, we should prioritize that which is both first and final. We will never outgrow our need for love.

We are called to pursue love first and then desire spiritual gifts, specifically prophecy, which brings clear public benefit (1 Corinthians 14:1). Zeal for spiritual gifts is fitting, but believers should seek to edify the church. Tongues with interpretation are a sin to unbelievers, whereas prophecy primarily benefits the believer (v. 22). In the case of the unbeliever, speaking in tongues abruptly captures the attention of someone who has never witnessed such a demonstration. Tongues highlight that a message is coming from God, not simply the person speaking. However, without interpretation or prophecy, a group of people speaking in tongues would confuse those who are inexperienced or unbelievers (v. 23). Prophecy can expose the secrets of an unbeliever and confirm the miraculous working of the Spirit in the church, inspiring unbelievers to turn to Jesus. Seeking spiritual gifts for the sake of love strengthens the church. **Love is the maturing characteristic that will define believers in the present and in the future age**.

All things should be done "*decently and in order*," giving consideration to blessing the church ang glorifying God (v. 40). Behaving properly in church enables each person to grow, learn, and be comforted. Remember, love is not puffed up, self-seeking, or improper. Love motivates us to be used by God so we can be useful to our brothers and sisters. Fear fades away when we pursue love. Loving one another involves submitting to one another out of reverence for God.

Spiritual gifts are an important vehicle for ministry in the church. The Corinthian church was zealous for gifts and needed some direction. The apostle did not crush their enthusiasm but pointed them back to the path of love. The potential of spiritual gifts is exciting and biblical, and we should seek the Lord so we may operate in our local church. The prospect of a church ordered by love is even greater, and in our community, giftedness is inevitable. Our gifts aren't for ourselves; they are for the edification of the body. Building up the church is something we can all contribute to in our own unique ways. When love is the guiding principle, what we build will undoubtedly glorify God, endure every challenge, and bring joy to the builders.